

HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
HIGH TOWN
RAGGED SCHOOL,
CRADLEY.

By ISAAC MEACHEM, Jun.

Together with a POETICAL SKETCH of
the same, by the late THOS. PALMER.

With PHOTOGRAPHS of
The late NOAH HINGLEY, Esq.,

AND

MR. THOS. CROWTHER.

NINEPENCE.

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INTRODUCTION.

*"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit,
saith the Lord of Hosts."* Zech. iv. 6.

To the observer of the progress of christian churches, the truth of the above passage of Holy Writ becomes more apparent as his range of observation increases. It is not wealth, or the power and influence of man, which is the cause of prosperity in the church, but the influence of God's Holy Spirit.

I have seen churches composed chiefly of men of wealth and influence, which to a superficial observer, appeared to make great progress, there were a large number of members, the books shewed great financial progress, and all seemed satisfactory, when, on looking more closely at their spiritual condition they were found to be dead in spiritual matters, not all the gold or power of men could give spiritual life to them, but on the contrary has often been the means of deadening and even burying the spiritual life they once had; to such how applicable the letter recorded by St. John to the angel of the Laodiceans—Rev. iii. 17-18—
"Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable,

and poor, and blind, and naked : I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

On the other hand, I have known churches, the members of which were the oft-despised poor, but who were rich in faith, and in the love of God, and consequently rich in spiritual blessings, whose influence for good has been felt far and wide, the simple reason being that in the former case, the church was upheld by men who relied on their riches and influence to make the church prosperous, whilst the latter was carried on by men whose hearts God had touched, who relied on the aid and presence of His Holy Spirit to guide them in their earnest endeavours to do good to those around them.

An example of a church of the latter class is to be found in High Town Ragged School, Cradley. Here, in a plain commodious brick building, are gathered together week after week, a band of earnest workers for God, endeavouring in their own simple way, with the aid of God's Holy Spirit to guide the feet of the poor, despised, ragged outcasts of Cradley, to a knowledge of the Saviour, the success of whose endeavours may be seen in the fact, that in the year 1860, a few persons met together in a house to learn the way to heaven, and now (1878) some 400 or 500 are gathered together sabbath after sabbath, "To hear of heaven and learn the way."

My first acquaintance with this school is but of comparatively recent date, and was made at a time

when I ran no small risk of losing my first love, but thanks be to God, my acquaintance with the school has been the means, by the blessing of God, of quickening me in the faith.

Passing down the lane at the front of the Ragged School, on the evening of February 21, 1877, I noticed the school was lit up; supposing the week night service was being held, I sauntered in, and found the friends awaiting the arrival of the preacher, who, however, appears not to have been able to attend, as he did not come. After I had been in a short time, one of the friends came to me and asked if I was a preacher, I replied in the affirmative, and thereupon complied with his request to preach that evening. Struck with their kind reception and open-heartedness, I joined them, and have ever since been connected with the school as far as circumstances will allow; the result of which was that I became acquainted with the history of the school, which I now present to the public, hoping that the reader will pass over all imperfections and faults, and learn the lessons contained therein; and I trust the Holy Spirit will so bless the reading of this little work, that its readers shall wake up to a sense of their responsibilities, and go and work in the vineyard of the Lord.

For the information contained in this work I am indebted to Mr. Crowther, and to a brief "Epitome of the history of Cradley Ragged School" by Mr. Jesse Southall; the information respecting the clubs was supplied by the Secretary, Mr. Joseph Christopher.

ISAAC MEACHEM, Jun.

Bank Lays,
Cradley, Feb. 21, 1878.



THOMAS CROWTHER.

HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF THE
HIGH TOWN RAGGED SCHOOL,
CRADLEY.

It was the last Sunday in May, 1860, that Mr. Thomas Crowther, of Cradley, with a heart burning with a desire to work for his heavenly master in winning souls for the kingdom of heaven, was distributing tracts in High Town, Cradley, a place renowned for almost every species of sin and vice, a place where, as it were, Satan held his carnival, and lying, cheating, swearing, gambling, fighting, pigeon-flying, and sabbath-breaking were indulged in to a fearful extent. Husbands forgot their duty to their wives, wives to their husbands, parents to children, and children to parents, whilst the salvation of their never dying souls was utterly neglected being scarcely ever thought of.

Passing by some workshops, Mr. Crowther came across a group of about sixteen persons of both sexes, lying in their filth and dirt, most pitiable objects of humanity, with their children, poor neglected objects, with them. This sight moved him to compassion ; seeing their days were spent in wretchedness here, with no hope of a better hereafter, he stopped, spoke to them of heaven,

received no answer but sullen looks, he then offered them tracts, but they refused them, none being able to read.

Finding it was of no use attempting anything like a serious conversation with them, he changed his style of argument, and said, pointing to the spot where the Ragged School now stands, "How should you like a Baker's shop there, where you could have as much bread as you wished without having to pay for it; and a Tailor's shop opposite, where you could have trousers, waistcoats and jackets, free of expense?" This at once roused their attention. "Ah," said they, "That is just what we should like." "Then," said Mr. Crowther, "I have a book here which offers you all, bread and water for nothing, for it says, 'your bread shall be given, and your water shall be sure,' you have only to ask, and it shall be given you"; this opened their mouths, and then they began to talk about these good things, and the wonderful Book which spoke of them. He then asked, "should you like to learn to read?" "Yes, that we would." "Is there anywhere we can meet to learn?" "Yes, master," said one of them, "you can have our house." "When shall we begin?" "Next Sunday morning." "What time?" "Nine o'clock." "That is too soon, let the missis have time to give the children their breakfast, and put the house straight, suppose we say Ten o'clock." So it was then agreed to meet at 10 a.m. the next Sunday, it being the first Sunday in June, 1860.

On that day, Mr. Crowther taking with him a few books, at the appointed time went to the house, he there found five of the men he had been speaking to the Sunday before, awaiting him in a miserable kitchen, lined round with pigeon pens, in

which were pigeons making a continued din, the only seat in the place being an old broken chair. Going in he put the books down, when eager to have a book each, they rushed forward and seized them. "Stop," said Mr. Crowther, "that is not the way to begin, let us make it a rule, never to begin a meeting without first asking God's blessing by singing and prayer, and again never to close a meeting without prayer." This was readily agreed upon. These preliminaries being arranged, a hymn was given out, and they attempted to sing, but failed, Mr. Crowther's heart was too full, and they did not know how, so they opened the meeting simply with prayer. In the afternoon about sixteen met Mr. Crowther, and like those who came in the morning, the fresh comers rushed to get each a book, but the others stopped and told them of the rules which had been made respecting opening and closing the meetings, to which they agreed.

Such then was the humble commencement of that glorious institution, the High Town Ragged School; how truly it illustrates the text—"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord," whose ways are wonderful and past finding out.

Having thus made a start in gathering them together, to learn to read and the way to heaven, Mr. Crowther determined to try by all means that lay in his power, to keep them to it; with this determination, he visited them from time to time, and when tired of his visits or ashamed to meet him, they hid themselves in the pantry, or bedroom, nothing daunted, he searched them out, and then by kind encouraging words persuaded them to come to his school, telling them to give it a fair

trial for three months, and then, if they did not like it, he would pension them off. A house being opened for them to meet in regularly, and books found them, he began to instruct them ; and what an instructive sight it was ! Married men who had not had a day's schooling in their lives, were there learning the alphabet ; and really earnest they were in their endeavours to learn. One man in particular, a nailer, when at work would hang his alphabet card over the hearth in his workshop, so that every spare moment he had, might be spent in studying it ; that man can now read his Bible.

Seeing the success of the men's meetings, the women became wishful to join them, and they would often stand at the door watching with eager interest their husbands being taught to read, and the way to heaven. Seeing this, Mrs. Crowther, took up their cause, and getting the loan of two houses, she formed a women's class in the one and a girl's class in the other, and worked earnestly among them, directing them to the Saviour, and teaching them to read. Like the men, they were truly in earnest in their endeavours to learn to read, often studying their alphabet with their children in their arms, or lying at their feet ; some of the women were from 50 to 60 years of age, yet all were earnest to learn ; one woman especially, 60 years of age, came asking with the simplicity of a child to be taught to read, and she so set her mind to learn that she succeeded so as to be able to read whole chapters in the Bible.

Owing to circumstances over which they had no control, they had to leave the house in which they met ; another was obtained, but unavoidable circumstances obliged them to leave it, after occupying it a short time. As it was then fine

weather, it was suggested that they should meet in a garden which appeared to be barren, as it never repaid the time and toil spent in its cultivation. This suggestion was acted upon, and with a zeal and earnestness worthy of the greatest commendation, Mrs. Crowther went from house to house to borrow seats, and then conducted the meetings in the open air; this required no small amount of courage, and I can fully endorse her words when she said—"It was a severe cross to me, singing, and praying by myself in the open air, whilst numerous persons were standing around gazing on the while." Success, however, rewarded her labours, the seed sown began to bear fruit, and the learners began to be anxious about their never dying souls. The services did not continue long out of doors the weather being too changeable; a house was again sought for and found, and they again held their meeting under cover.

They now began to have preaching by various preachers on Sunday afternoons, the first sermon preached to the men was by the late Father Bennett, a man whose heart and soul was in the Ragged School work, the text was, "No man careth for my soul."—Psalm cxlii, last clause of the 4th verse; he also preached the first sermon to the women, and to most of them it was the first sermon they ever heard, on this occasion he took for his text, St. Mark xiv. 8, "She hath done what she could." Many and rich were the blessings enjoyed by these poor people under the ministry of God's word in those humble dwellings.

Thus matters went on for the first six months, when it was found their numbers had so increased that the houses in which they met would not accommodate them. The cry was then raised, "More

room." Some were dispirited, and said, "Shall we ever have a room of our own," but Mrs. Crowther exhorted them to trust in God, who would help them in their time of need.

Seeing the imperative necessity of more commodious rooms in which to meet, Mr. Crowther went to the late Noah Hingley, Esq., who was a great friend to Ragged Schools, and stated the case to him. Mr. Hingley asked, "Where is there a place which will suit you?" "In the old room the Baptists used to meet in, in Butcher's Lane," replied Mr. Crowther, "it belongs to Mr. Lewis, a nailmaster. "I will get it for you, and free of rent." Mr. Hingley then went to Mr. Lewis, who told him he could have it for a small rental, Mr. Hingley then told him they were poor people and could not afford to pay. Mr. Lewis then gave him the key, telling him he would consider the matter over.

About three months after this, one of the men from the school, who made nails for Mr. Lewis, took some work to him, Mr. Lewis asked how the Cradley Ragged School was going on. "O," said the man, "it is doing more good than any school in Cradley." "Then," said Mr. Lewis, "you may tell Mr. Crowther from me, that he may have the building as long as he wants it, free of rent." Mr. Crowther having bought some benches, they entered on their new premises, and here God signally blessed them. Mr. Crowther was now ably assisted in his work by Mr. Joseph Whitley, Mr. Jesse Southall, Mr. Thomas Palmer, and Mr. Webb, together with many other friends who came and preached the gospel to them on Sunday evenings. Here many found the Saviour, and the sincerity of their christian profession was shewn in their walk

and conduct. One man, before he joined the school, was deeply in debt to a tailor, of Cradley, who, believing he would never be paid, had reckoned it among his bad debts, the man joined the school, was converted, became a changed man, and the result was, during the first year after his conversion he saved money enough, by keeping from public houses, to rear a pig, and pay what he owed to the tailor; the tailor afterwards said, "If that man wanted three suits of clothes from me I could trust him any length of time for the money."

In addition to the Sunday services, a "fellowship" meeting was instituted, which was held on Saturday evenings, and was the means of doing much good. A touching incident relative to these "fellowship" meetings was related to me a short time ago by Mr. Crowther. A man who had been a miserable drunkard began to attend these Saturday evening meetings, and soon a great change was noticed in him, formerly he had been in the habit of going to the public house, there wasting his money in drink and going home at midnight, drunk, when he would throw himself all at length on the hearth, to sleep the effects of his debauch away, his poor wife not daring to retire to rest while he lay there, lest he should get burned; but when he began to attend the Ragged School he came home sober. One Saturday evening his little girl, noticing her father was not at home, inquired of her mother where he was. "Gone to his drink," her mother replied. "Oh dear!" she said, "he'll come home drunk, and pull the clock down again, I wish he had gone to the Ragged School." But how agreeably was she disappointed, when instead of coming home insane with drink, he came sober; and soon his little daughter had the pleasure of

seeing her father sitting at the feet of Jesus, with the peace of God which passeth all understanding in his heart.

The work in the humble meeting house in Butcher's Lane was signally blessed by God, many of the worst characters of Cradley were converted there, and many were added to the church. Thus matters went on till the time came round, when the annual "Wake" was held. The "Wake" was held the Thursday following Whit Sunday, when the members of the various Friendly Societies and Clubs walked round the town, after which they met together and spent the afternoon in feasting, which was usually followed by a night's debauch. Now, said some who despised the work in Butcher's Lane, we shall see what will become of your Ragged School. Being fully aware of the temptations which would assail the new converts, Mr. Crowther and his friends held a meeting to decide what steps should be taken to counteract the evil influences of the wake. It was decided to hold a prayer meeting at seven o'clock on the morning of the wake, and as the club feast was to be held at two o'clock in the afternoon, to have a procession of all the teachers, scholars, and friends of the school at three o'clock.

At six o'clock that morning, a bellman was sent round to call the members to the seven o'clock prayer meeting, and an earnest prayer meeting it was. "Never," said Mr. Crowther to me, "shall I forget the homely, touching, fervent prayer that fell from the lips of one who had long been a champion of Satan."—"O Lord, tell me when I have had enough at my feast to-day." The day wore on, the members of the various clubs walked in procession round the town, among them were some from the

Ragged School. At two o'clock they went to their feast. The person who had so earnestly prayed at the morning prayer meeting for Divine guidance, was at the feast; when he thought he had had enough, he rose from his seat, and said to a friend, "I have had enough, come, let us go to the school." At three p.m., as arranged, a procession of about 200 teachers, scholars and friends, was formed at the Ragged School; headed by a large banner carried by two men who had formerly been the champion pugilists of Cradley, the procession, to the no small astonishment of the people of Cradley, walked through the town, and at various places sang hymns, among which was the following, sung to the tune of the National Anthem—

Peace to the Ragged School!
Long may it reign and rule,
Grow and extend;
May all its efforts be
Crowned with prosperity,
Till vice and misery
Shall have an end.

Joy to each girl and boy!
Pure and abiding joy
May they secure;
Riches a thousand fold,
Better than pearl or gold,
Whose worth, when time is old,
Shall still endure.

Thus, instead of being weakened by the wake, this noble work was strengthened, as by joining the procession, its members publicly acknowledged themselves as members of the visible church of Christ, having left the broad way which leadeth to destruction, and stepped into the narrow way leading to eternal life.

The good work went on, souls were saved; the room in which they met was filled with men and

women earnest to know of things eternal, and also how to read God's word; at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. every Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Crowther met them to instruct them in God's word, and at 6 p.m. the gospel was preached to them by the late Mr. Palmer, Mr. J. Southall, or some other faithful messenger, under the influence of which souls were saved, sinners convicted, and arrested in their mad career, and brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. "Never," says Mrs. Crowther, "shall I forget holding a child in each arm, while the mothers were earnestly seeking mercy." Some of the women had to contend with drunken, ungodly husbands, who did not scruple to abuse them for attending the services at the Ragged School, with oaths forbidding them to go near the school, and with curses, threatenings, and even blows, did their utmost to keep them away, but without effect, for they still went, and prayed for the Holy Spirit to break the hard hearts of their husbands, and soften them by Divine grace. Their prayers were not without effect, for in answer to their petitions the Holy Spirit so operated on the hearts of their husbands that they were compelled to cry—

Nay, but I yield, I yield;
I can hold out no more;
I sink, by dying love compell'd,
And own thee conquerer.

So that husband and wife have joined hand in hand, and travelled along the heavenly road singing—

O happy day that fixed my choice
On thee, my Saviour and my God;
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.

O happy bond, that seals my vows,
To him who merits all my love;

Let cheerful anthems fill his house,
While to that sacred shrine I move.
'Tis done, the great transaction's done,
I am my Lord's and he is mine;
He drew me and I followed on,
Glamm'd to confess the voice divine.

For two years the good work went on in the old place in Butcher's Lane, during which time many persons who before had sneered and scoffed at religion, became truly converted, and lovers of God and his word, and having tasted of the sweets of religion, could say, in the language of the poet:—

Should all the forms which men devise,
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind Thy gospel to my heart.

At this period, the work had so increased that their meeting house was not sufficiently large to contain them, and the old cry was again raised, "Give us more room, our place has become too strait for us." Again their generous friend and benefactor, the late Noah Hingley, Esq., came to their aid, and in conjunction with Jeston Homfray, Esq., and the late Mr. Thomas Bloomer, made arrangements for a school to be built which should belong to the Ragged School friends. With this object they opened a subscription list, which was nobly filled by the various firms and gentlemen of the district. The teachers and scholars themselves, in their earnest desire to have a school of their own, contributed their pence from time to time, the amount thus realized by them amounted to the handsome sum of £40.

When funds sufficient to authorize them to commence building was collected, the work of erecting the school was commenced. The day on which the first load of bricks was drawn to the site

of the new school, was the day fixed for a treat to be given to the scholars, but Mr. Crowther told them they could not have their treat till some bricks were on the ground ; this did not seem very likely as potatoes were growing on the ground the very morning of the day appointed for the treat. However, in order that the children should not be disappointed, Mr. Hingley went to the man who owned the potatoes, and, with his characteristic generosity, paid the man the value of them, and then told him to get them up at once ; they being but a very poor crop, he also gave the man the potatoes for his trouble in getting them up.

The potatoes having been removed, great was the rejoicing among the children, teachers and friends of the school, when horses decorated with flags drew up the first load of bricks on the ground ; then, in the afternoon, the children had their promised treat, which was enjoyed the more from the prospect of soon having a new school of their own to meet in.

Soon the school was seen rising from its foundation, a good, plain, substantial brick building, capable of holding about 400 persons. A few weeks before its completion a feast was given by the late Messrs. Hingley and Bloomer to the poor of Cradley, when the command "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." (Luke xiv. 21) was literally obeyed, for here were gathered together the aged, the lame, the blind and the needy ; and what a blessed sight it was to see the neglected poor, the despised lame, and the helpless blind, sitting down to a bountiful feast, being waited on by the gentry of Cradley, and served by Messrs. Hingley and Bloomer. At

the close of the feast each person received sixpence. The practice of giving the poor aged of Cradley a feast, and a shilling each, is continued annually at the expense of the gentry of the neighbourhood.

When the school was completed a tea meeting was held in it; after tea a crowded and enthusiastic meeting was held, Mr. Hingley in the chair; addresses were delivered by the late venerable Father Bennett, Messrs. Crowther, Southall, and others, but the most notable speech of the evening was by the late Mr. Thomas Palmer, which is reproduced at the end of this book.

The first bibles for the use of the school were given by Mr. Simpson; and the clock inside the school by Mr. Fisher, Silversmith, of Walsall and Dudley; christian gentlemen ever ready to help in times of need.

The christian work so long and successfully carried on in Butcher's Lane, was now transferred to the new school; here again, the blessing of God still followed them, so that in a few years they were compelled to enlarge the school, which is now well filled every Sunday. Many will have to praise God through all eternity for the blessings derived in Cradley Ragged School; it has, I believe, been the birthplace of many christians, and will, I trust, be of many more. Its value to Cradley cannot be estimated; it has been the means of saving souls, reclaiming drunkards, turning the adulterous into paths of virtue, and binding together by the bonds of love, persons who were living at enmity with each other; such are a few of the benefits of the Ragged School, but its real value will not be known until the day in which Christ will come to number up his jewels.

The religious principles of this school are strictly protestant, its articles of belief being summed up in the creed known as the Apostles Creed, which together with the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, are printed on two large tablets, the gift of the late Mr. Thomas Bloomer, in front of the congregation. Here, all protestants, the Churchman, the Wesleyan, the Independent, the New Connexion, the Baptist and the Primitive Methodist, meet on equal grounds, and ministers of these various denominations frequently occupy the rostrum, and proclaim the truth as it is in Jesus.

In connection with the school is a clothing club, a women's death club, and a men's sick and burial club.

The members of the clothing club pay weekly what they think proper, from a penny upwards; at the close of the club year tickets are issued to them containing the amount they have paid in, together with the interest; enabling them to purchase clothing to that amount. The number of members in this club at the end of the year 1877, was upwards of 330.

The women's death club was established in the year 1863. By paying one shilling per month a surgeon is provided in any case of sickness in the family; at the death of any member of the family money is given varying according to the age of the deceased person, from £5 downwards, and at the close of the club year all money in hand over £100 is divided equally among the members.

Members of the men's sick and burial club pay from 1s. 4d. to 1s. 10d., per month, according to age when entering the club, the benefits in case of

sickness are—10s. per week for the first 15 weeks.

7s. 6d. „ „ second 15 „

5s. „ „ remainder of time during

which he is ill, even if it lasts till death. This club was established in the year 1867, with five members; at the close of the year 1877, it numbered upwards of 100 members. The amount in Treasurer's hands year ending June, 1876, was £287 2 0, the year ending June, 1877, £349 10s., shewing an increase during the year of £62 8 0, thus shewing the flourishing condition of the club.

I cannot close this sketch of Cradley Ragged School without a brief reference to the late Noah Hingley, Esq., whose death has recently occurred, leaving a void in the school and neighbourhood which will not easily be filled.

From the commencement of the Cradley Ragged School he has been one of its most generous, earnest and devoted supporters, helping in time of need both in financial matters and practical counsel. He was too, a regular attendant at the school, cheering the hearts of the friends by his presence; Sunday after Sunday found him at the school, never being absent except in case of extreme necessity. His acts of kindness and benevolence, together with his genial manner, endeared him to the hearts of thousands who knew him, and felt on hearing of his death, the 21st of October, 1877, they had lost a friend indeed.

On the evening of Sunday, December 9, 1877, Mr. Hingley's funeral sermon was preached to a large audience in the Ragged School, by Mr. Samuel Edwards, of Netherton, his text being 1st. Corinthians xv. chap., 31st verse—"I die daily."

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Doxy Fingley,

(Of Cradley, Worcestershire).

Who entered into rest October 21st, 1877.

In his 82nd Year.

And was interred at Halesowen, October 26th.

"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings;
he shall not stand before mean men."

Facts relating to
Cradley Ragged School,

BY

THOMAS PALMER.

*"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes, and
bring in hither the poor, and the maimed and the halt,
and the blind."*—Luke xiv. 21.

INTRODUCTION.

Dear Reader,

By request, the contents of this little book have been printed, in order to present you with a few of the most interesting facts connected with the rise and progress of High Town Ragged School, Cradley.

I am quite aware of the fact that many pleasing incidents have transpired in connection with the above institution which are not made mention of, for it would more than fill a volume to describe to you all the incidents of interest which have been brought before the teachers and friends of the above school. My aim and object has been to simply march along the line of progress, and collect a few of the most interesting truths and place them in their present position to attract your attention, and to shew what can be effected by faith, perseverance, and a firm reliance on the word of God. Little did I think, when I began to write, that what I wrote would ever pass through the press, and appear before the public in the shape of a little book; but at a tea meeting held in the New Ragged School-room, High-town, on Friday, May the 29th, 1863, Mr. Noah Hingley in the chair, the contents of this little book were read amid much cheering; and at the close of the meeting, it was requested by the authorities of the school to have them printed; that request has been complied with. The prayer of the writer is, that

they may not be in vain, but be the means of arousing many sleeping christians from their slothful condition to a state of activity in the cause and church of Christ, so that, feeling the solemn responsibility of the Saviour's command resting upon them—"Work, while it is called to-day,"—they may at once begin to seek by prayer their proper sphere of spiritual labour, and having found it, by the grace of God, be enabled to commence at once to work therein; whether as a ragged school teacher, a visitor of the sick, a tract distributor, or as a minister of the gospel: for woe unto those who may be found idling away their time when the night of death overtakes them, for, as the wise man remarks—"there is no work, nor devise, nor knowledge in the grave whither we are all hastening." In conclusion, I would just state that upwards of three hundred, men, women, and children, are being taught every Sabbath in the above school, who previously attended no school nor any place of worship. Well it may be said—"What wonders has God wrought among us!"

T. P.

PART I.

I long had purposed in my mind
To write it down, I felt inclined
To make a Poem, and inscribe the whole
In praise of Cradley Ragged School.

But to begin, I must first state
Some facts, which to High Town relate :
Inform you how this school began,
And who it was conceived the plan :
'Twas Thomas Crowther—known to be
A man of faith and charity,—
Whom God inclined to start this plan ;
And up High Town he first began.
Began alone, these means to try,
Receiving help from God, on high.
But soon his efforts were repaid,
And God sent others to his aid.
Thus form'd the school began to thrive
Like bees, in Crowther's ragged hive ;
Where they are taught to read and spell,
And warn'd to flee from sin and hell.
But here, allow me to describe
The habits of this once dark tribe.
Here, in High Town, as dark a race
As could be found in any place,
The pigeon-men could there be seen
In all their habits low and mean ;
Here, drunken brawls, and fighting too,
Were common facts, as Cradley knew.
Such was the state High-town was in,
And such the depth of vice and sin,
That oaths and curses filled the air,
Which made one tremble to be there :
There, hats and caps, and bonnets too,
Were scarcely worn, but by a few :

Men, women, children, each were drest
On every morning in their best.
Now to describe their homes I'll try,
And if you ask the reason why,
My answer is,—that all may know
The facts that I can plainly show :
That High-town people changed have been
To habits now both neat and clean.
No love or peace could once be seen ;
No happy home both neat and clean ;
No father kind, no mother dear,
To teach their little children there
The way to heaven, where all may go,
By living as they ought below.
But every house in which one went
Was pictured sloth and discontent ;
A place of sin where Satan dwelt,
Where often too, his power was felt,—
Was felt in blows and words unkind,
In acts that often pained the mind,
Till dark despair would hide the light
Which Christians tried to bring in sight.
This was the state High-town was in,
When Thomas Crowther did begin
Three years ago this very May (1863)
To storm High-town and win the day.
He took a house where he could meet
His ragged pupils in the week,
And teach them, in his own plain way,
To read, hate sin, love God, and pray.
He first began with four or five,
But soon High-town was all alive ;
For into every house he went,
To buy their pigeons his intent.
He knew if he the pigeons bought,
To school more easy they'd be brought,
Where they might learn to read and pray,

And hear of heaven and walk the way.
He bought the pigeons, won the men,
Who soon pull'd down their pigeon pen,
And instituted in the place,
The ragged school and means of grace.
But soon the house became too small
To hold the men and children all,
Therefore a place had to be sought,
And either borrowed, begged, or bought,
Determined one should be the case,
They set about to find a place.
And without means their ends to gain,
They found the one in Butcher's Lane ;
And all agreed 'twas just the place
To have their school and means of grace :
For all together there could meet,
And worship at the Saviour's feet :
The husband, wife, and children too,
When altogether, not a few.
But now the place had to be took,
And to whose influence could they look,
To help in this their time of need,
And prove to them a friend indeed ?
They had not long to look in vain,
For one whom I'm about to name,
Engaged their cause to undertake,
Aid help them out at any rate.
His name is known the district through,
By churchmen and dissenters too ;
His liberal hands have each supplied,
For few indeed has he denied.
All honour to such gentlemen,
Who give, and say they'll give again,
To God-like institutions such
As this one which we love so much.
His name you'll all be glad to hear,
Is he not worthy of a cheer ?

Then I propose we give him three :
Hurrah ! for Noah Hingley.
'Twas he who did for you obtain
The dear old place in Butcher's Lane,
His mind was fixed before he went,
To take the place, but pay no rent ;
And he succeeded, as you know,
For soon into it you did go,
Where many of you peace received,
The moment you on Christ believed.
Your Sabbath evenings there were spent
In listening to the gospel sent.
To teach you all the way to heaven,
And how your sins may be forgiven.
Each christian sect was there employed,
Who preached Jesus crucified,
Whose only aim was souls to win
From vice to virtue, free from sin.
So interesting was the sight,
To see them on a Sabbath night,
Though ragged, dirty, come to hear
The word of God, to sinners dear.
And often has the preacher seen
The tears of many a Magdalene,
And heard their prayers to be set free
From sin and guilt and misery.
What mighty battles have been fought
By sinners who have there been brought
To see their sins, in black array,
Arraign'd before them, night and day.
No peace of conscience could they find,
For Satan with his power, designed
To stop their pathway to the Lord,
Who could alone true peace afford.
But Jesus Christ was in the field,
With power to make the devils yield ;
And soon the powers which darken'd heaven

By love and truth were quickly driven
Down to their den, in that dark cell,
Prepared by God for them to dwell.
The pathway cleared, the darkness gone,
Christ's love and mercy brightly shone,
Enabling them to see the road
Where they could cast their heavy load ;
And up the hill in faith they went,
Climbing in prayer, the high ascent,
Till at the cross they stood and gazed,
In love and wonder quite amazed.
Their burden gone, their sins forgiven,
Possessed with titles clear for heaven.
Their happiness was now complete,
For, sitting at the Saviour's feet,
They felt their Jesu's dying love,
Preparing them for heaven above.

PART II.

Two years, and more, had pass'd away,
Since that eventful Sabbath day ;
When Crowther's school began to be
A source of praise through Cradley.
It many trials had passed through,
But still it prospered, spread, and grew,
Till all around had heard its fame,
Some came to see and help the same,
Amongst the numbers, came to see,
Were Bloomer, Wood, and Humphrey,
Each one had deeply been impressed
By what they saw and heard expressed :
And all concluded there should be
A school-room built in Cradley.
And Thomas Bloomer soon began,
'To work in earnest, like a man.
No time was lost in looking round
For a convenient piece of ground
Whereon this ragged school should stand,
A proof of God's providing hand.
Our friend, the chairman, took the lead,
Resolving firmly to succeed ;
With Thomas Bloomer for his friend
They worked together to the end.
They bought the ground and got the plan,
They begged some bricks and soon began
To build this school, knowing the Lord
Would after death their toils reward.
'Tis through the efforts they have made
That every brick has here been laid ;
We thank them from our hearts and pray
That God would bless them night and day.
The school began to grow and rise,
Its pleasing features to the skies ;
But just before it stood complete,
In it was given a God-like treat.

And here I bring before your mind,
The poor and aged, lame and blind;
Who were invited to this treat,
And round the tables took their seat :
Their sticks and crutches laid aside ;
With knives and forks they were supplied.
And when the meat came steaming in,
And all were ready to begin,
Bloomer and Hingley carved the meat,
And gave each one enough to eat.
Better fare could not be found,
Had you have searched the country round.
They brought their wives to help to wait,
And everything was done first-rate.
The grace was sung, the plates were pass'd
Supplied with meat not long to last :
Potatoes too were handed round,
Till every plate its portion found.
If you had seen them as they sat,
It would indeed have made you laugh ;
To see them try with all their might,
To use their knives and forks aright.
But I must leave you to complete
The picture of this christian treat,
And come to this pleasing fact to tell,
This school is finished, finished well.
Just look around, 'tis quite a treat,
So well arranged, so clean and neat,
That each one here must be impressed
That all have done their very best.
This brings me to another fact ;
A loving, earnest working act ;
This ragged school itself hath found
The noble sum of forty pound.
But now I'll hasten to conclude,
Or on your time I shall intrude,
For as I gaze upon the clock,

It seems to say, knock off, knock off.
About this clock I now must speak,
It has not yet been there a week ;
And how it came, to you I'll tell,
I hope it always will go well ;
It is a gift from Mr. Fisher,
A christian, and a liberal giver,
Who cannot easily say no,
When beggars, such as Crowther, go.
But now I have a word to say
About our meeting here to-day,
I think we've all ourselves enjoyed,
And shall go home quite satisfied.
But just before I say adieu,
Just take a retrospective view,
Look back upon the last three years,
And what a contrast then appears.
You could not then kneel down and pray
For God to bless you night and day,
But now it is your chief delight,
To ask God's blessings day and night.
What happy changes have been wrought,
Through what this ragged school has taught,
Look round this room and you will see,
A happy christian company
Who through this school can say to-day,
We're marching in the good old way
Which leads to heaven and perfect bliss,
Where, on the hills of happiness,
Our souls shall roam in pure delight,
For ever in the Saviour's sight.
O happy prospect, love unknown,
To think that we before his throne,
Shall stand complete in that great day,
When Jesus to his saints will say,
Enter with joy your heavenly home,
And sit with me upon my throne.

Be this the portion of us all,
When Christ shall be our all in all,
God bless this school, and let it be
A monument of love :
May teachers, scholars, friends agree
To meet in heaven above.



The following Poems were written by

Mrs. COOPER,

A teacher in the Ragged School. The first was composed after hearing a sermon preached in the Ragged School, from the text—"And the desire of all nations shall come."—Haggai ii. middle clause of the 7th verse.

Come, thou desire of nations, come,
And enter my poor wandering heart ;
Take full possession of thine own,
Come rule and reign in every heart.

Before the world was form'd or light,
Or wheels of time began to move,
Thy love was with the sons of men,
And still is everlasting love.

And when he by transgression fell,
And brought the curse on all his race,
Thy love dispell'd the thickening gloom,
And bid the sword of vengeance cease.

By prophets thou wast long foretold.
By sacrifices year by year ;
But types and shadows died away,
When Christ our passover appear'd.

The angels sang, let earth be glad,
For unto us a son is given ;
An infant in the manger laid,
A Saviour Christ, the Lord from heaven.

Subject unto thy parents here,
A pattern of humility ;
And the whole law which man had broke,
Thou hast fulfill'd to set him free.

On earth thou suffered'st grief and pain,
On earth thy goodness was displayed ;
The deaf and dumb, and blind and lame,
Found at thy hand essential aid.

But yet thy work was not complete,
A sacrifice thou cam'st to be,
Upon the cross to bleed and die
For sinful creatures such as me.

And when thou in the grave wast laid,
Thy flesh did not corruption see ;
On the third day thy power displayed
And rose to set thy people free.

And now, enthron'd above the sky,
At God's right hand the Saviour see ;
Our great high priest within the veil,
He pleads the blood he shed for me.

Come then, ye weary sin sick souls,
Receive the offered mercy free ;
Come seek his face, and taste his grace,
And you with him will happy be.

Where saints and angels sweetly join,
To praise the great eternal three ;
There sing the song of love divine,
Which join'd to save such worms as we.

FAITH.

Great Author of faith my spirit inspire,
And fill my whole soul with incessant desire,
My Jesus to follow, my seal to set to,
Till I my Redeemer in heaven shall view.

With patience enduring whatever betide,
I'll trust on the promise, the Lord will provide,
And if I am faithful, his word it is true,
That I my Redeemer in heaven shall view.

I love my dear Shepherd, when I hear his voice
My heart doth rebound, my soul doth rejoice ;
He calls me unto him, my strength to renew,
Till I my Redeemer in heaven shall view.

Lord bless me, and keep me, and guide me till
death,
Support when thou call'st me to yield my last
breath ;
And Jordan's cold stream do thou bring me
safe through,
Then lead me to heaven my Jesus to view.

Finis.



NOAH HINGLEY, Esq.